

AMENDMENT TO THE SPECIFICATION

[0078] In one embodiment, the customs broker has access to the Item Master 123, which may also be called the product dictionary. As needed, the customs broker can consult the product dictionary to ascertain part attributes and identify the HTS code classifications assigned to items by the importer. After the customs broker has all the necessary information from the suppliers, freight forwarders, and the customs department of the importer, the customs broker may collect and prepare the comprehensive entry packet information 135 (step 35) and submit that information to U.S. customs as the shipment enters a designated port in the United States and is received by U.S. Customs (block 145). The customs broker will typically also pay the necessary tariff on behalf of the importer. In addition to submitting the entry packet information 135 to U.S. Customs, the customs broker may also submit the entry packet to the company's Customs department (or similar group responsible for maintaining such records) (step 145). The entry packet information 135 can then be incorporated into the entry history repository 127 of the TCS database 124, where it can be subsequently analyzed and audited (see below). In sum, in the entry process of one embodiment, (i) the goods are imported into the United States, (ii) the customs broker prepares an entry packet of information describing the relevant attributes of the goods for the purpose of computing tariffs, (iii) the customs broker submits the entry packet to U.S. Customs and back to the importer, and (iv) the customs broker pays the applicable tariff on the imported goods to be subsequently reimbursed by the importer. In addition, the entry packet information supplied by the customs broker in electronic format may be integrated into the TCS database for accurate record-keeping and auditing purposes.

[0099] FIG. 5B is a flow diagram that depicts an exemplary pre-entry process in accordance with an embodiment of the invention. In this example, "Co. Customs" represents a division of a company that is responsible for obtaining product information from other divisions of the company and applying

appropriate classification information for importation purposes. This step is described in more detail in the pre-entry process above. "Co. Customs" may obtain relevant information (step 504) from other company divisions 502 and customs brokers 503. As discussed above, various additional sources may trigger classification adds or changes. Notifications requiring action include the introduction of new models, customs ruling changes, self-audit discovery, or codes missing at entry. Using this information, the importer may perform appropriate classifications (step 505). That is, "Co. Customs" may assign HTS codes to products, along with other required information such as extended customs descriptions, legal rationale, and timestamps. "Co. Customs" may track Questions and Answers (501A, 501B) with other company divisions during the notification process. A Q/A log 508 may be created that contains information pertinent to product classification. "Co. Customs" may also perform the classification step and any subsequent audits to identify errors or discrepancies (step 506), as deemed appropriate. All classification information, associated bases for classification, and errors discovered during a subsequent audit may be entered into the TCS classification information repositories 515 which may be linked to an interface to customs tariff system 514 which may be linked to co. division systems.

[00108] In addition, other links may provide more general navigational capability. "Coweb" link 703 may provide a link to the home page of the corporate intranet of the importer. "US Customs" link 704 may provide a link to the U.S. Customs web page. "Fedex Trade Networks" link 705 provides a link to the web page of a customs broker. "Japan" link 706 may provide links to networks of the corporation located in Japan. "QA log" link 707 may provide a link to the log created by virtue of correspondence between the customs division of the importer and the customs broker. "Toolset" link 708 may allow a user to navigate to the PWC tool set. An online user guide may also be available via link 709.

[00109] FIG. 8 shows another screen 802 to enable a user to access information from the Item Master. In this example, the user has accessed the

Item Master by clicking on the "Item Master" link 701 in FIG. 7, thereby arriving at the screen 802 in FIG. 8. As shown by the area encompassed by 801, the TCS screen 802 in this embodiment contains a "headline" logo which may include a plurality of navigation commands to all functions (e.g., "Home", "Sys Admin", etc.). Underneath the general navigation commands in area 801 lies the sub-functions within the group selected (in this case the Item Master Classification).

[00127] In other embodiments, mappings may be created within the TCS which link various internal classifications only to commodity groups, or only to HTS codes. FIG. 14 is an illustration of a database map 1401 wherein internal classifications based on function are all linked directly to HTS codes. "FCN1" corresponds here to three items, labeled for illustrative purposes "PARTA1", "PARTA2" and "PARTA3". These parts correspond, respectively, to 10-digit HTS codes "CODEA1", "CODEA2" and "CODEA3". Likewise, "FCN2" contains parts "PARTB1" and "PARTB2", which are linked respectively to "CODEA4" and "CODEA5". "FCN3" links to "PARTC1" and "PARTC2", which respectively map 1401 to "CODEA6" and "CODEA7". Finally, "FCN4" links to "PARTD1" which is mapped to HTS code "CODEA8".

[00145] FIG. 18 shows another example of a screen 1802 that can be accessed by selecting the "HTS Detail" link 1703 in FIG. 17. FIG. 18 also illustrates the utility of the TCS by its advanced navigational capabilities and its user-friendly applications screens. These screens may be part of an integrated application which overlaps and links to the underlying database repositories which provide for uniform and easy access to and editing of information pertinent to U.S. Customs. Here, the HTS code 1804 of the selected product can be identified and readily compared with the information in the entry packet submitted by the customs broker to U.S. Customs. Further, the screen 1802 provides information about any necessary product attributes (if applicable), such as whether an anti-dumping duty 1805 or a countervailing duty 1806 may apply to items in the shipment. These records can be quickly and easily compared with the information in the electronic entry packet provided by the customs broker.

Any errors can thereby be identified and appropriate remedial measures may be taken. Links 1803 to View Audit Results and Add line Item may be provided.

[00161] FIG. 25 shows an example of a TCS screen 25022505 containing links to the electronically recorded entry packet information. In this example, an "Entry History" number 2504 is assigned to the entry packet for subsequent identification purposes. The entry packet shown has three elements. The user may navigate to the CF7501 Customs form by clicking on the link 2501. The user may also access directly the Commercial Invoice of the shipment associated with the entry packet by simply clicking on the link 25022505. The user may also navigate to the EDI by selecting link 2503. The entry packet may be linked in other embodiments to additional information. An illustration of the 7501 form related to the entry packet is shown in the screen 2602 of FIG. 26.

[00172] In the accounts payable department according to the disclosed embodiment, an employee reviews the summarized payment request received from the customs department (step 260). The employee may also compare the request with its own summary of payments to ensure accuracy and that duplicative reimbursements are avoided. The employee may also process the electronic broker invoices through the company's weekly A/P payment cycle. Payment is then transmitted to the customs broker. Typically, the employee also creates remittance information for entry into the TCS to reflect the reimbursement and to "complete the picture" within the TCS. A payment remit file 258 may be used.

[00184] The main menu 3004 further provides a number of additional TCS System Links 3008. In this example, "Coweb" may bring the user to the company's intranet, which may include a suite of functions dedicated to importation and U.S. Customs processing. Link 3007B may take the user directly to a U.S. Customs web site, or other repository of U.S. Customs related information for use in classification and other purposes. Link 3007C provides in this embodiment a link to a customs broker, which in this instance is Fedex Trade Networks. A link 3007D to the web site of the United States International Trade

Commission may be provided. A link 3007E to a corresponding division of the corporation in Japan may exist for, among other things, perusal by the analyst of the internal classifications of items. A Q/A log 3007F may also be obtained that may record questions and answers received from and provided to customs brokers and other third parties. A separate toolset link 3007G may provide the user with a plethora of other tools and links for navigating through the integrated data repository and finding information relating to a desired shipment, payment, audit, amendment, etc. A link 3007H to a user guide may conveniently enable the user to consult online help with respect to understanding various features or functions of the TCS. A link ~~3007H~~ 3007I may also allow the user to contact U.S. Customs, or, depending on the implementation, another division of the corporation or similar entity.

[00185] In addition to the set of available links 3008, the analyst in this implementation may access from the main menu a variety of TCS application functions 3013. The specific functions available will depend on the specific implementation; however, functions relating to at least some of the four main phases of operations may be presented. The user may access Classification functions 3009, entry-related functions 3010, entry packet related functions 3014, Internal Entry Audits ~~3004~~ 3011 and post-entry Amendments 3012.